

ALONG THE FIGHTING FRONT



Infantry going into action west of Château-Thierry in the lee of a ridge. [Signal Corps Photo.]

THE chaplains from two Yankee regiments that had stormed the slope above the Ourcq came wearily back at sundown from the task of burying their dead. They were two much uplifted men, and their eyes were shining as they made their brief but eloquent report.

"In all that battlefield," they said, "we found, without a single exception, that every one of those boys died crouching forward, died with his face toward Germany."

When, as happens often in the rush of open warfare, the airplanes are transformed into the most mobile of all artillery and sweep down to pour machine gun bullets into the unsheltered infantry of the enemy, they become targets for the crack rifle shot. A shot that reaches the head or heart of the low-flying assailant will do the trick.

The trick has been done a good many times. When, if ever again, there comes a lull in this bouncing war, it may be possible to assemble the data and announce how many German planes have been brought to earth this summer by Yankee rifles.

Or, better still, by Yankee riflemen, for on several occasions, officers and men at regimental and divisional headquarters dropped their work, grabbed up Boche rifles that had just been confiscated from prisoners and dashed out into the open to take a few pot shots.

A wounded officer from among the gallant French lancers had just been carried into a Yankee field hospital to have his dressing changed. He was full of compliments and curiosity about the dashing contingent that had fought at his regiment's left.

"A lot of them are mounted troops by this time," he explained, "for when our men would be shot from their horses, these youngsters would give one jumping jump and gallop ahead as cavalry. I believe they are your soldiers from Montezuma. At least, when they advanced this morning, they were all singing 'From the halls of Montezuma to the shores of Tripoli.' 'C'est épatant, ça!'"

A former sergeant who had just been busted and who carried fresh in his mind the melancholy memories of a court martial, was lifted wounded from the ambulance at the field hospital. He was grinning from ear to ear.

"Well," he said, "here's one stripe they can't take away from me, damn 'em."

The generation of American mothers that have trained their boys to care for their teeth as the people of no other country do would glow with pride if they could trek up in the wake of our Army in action and see the whole rear area dotted at sunrise with Yankee soldiers, just out of battle, and every man brushing his teeth. Often most of his possessions have been jettisoned in the rush of the advance.

And now abideth these three, the rifle, the shovel, and the tooth-brush. And the greatest of these—

Than Seringes, the village the Yanks captured on July 29, there is only one more battered town in all the area between the Marne and the Vesle. That is Vaux. Seringes had been held by the enemy for a good two months; his signs were on the buildings, his lettering on the guide-posts, his dead filled the village church yard. There the Yanks found buried many of the Boches who had died on July 15, the first day of the ill-starred offensive the Crown Prince wished he had never made. They had been carried back as far as Seringes and buried in a church yard which the Germans never dreamed they would have to give up. "Hier ruht..." "Es sterben fürs Vaterland" and so on. Of the church, only a shell is left, with two cherubs hanging uncertainly over the shattered altar and, as though still quickened by the vibrations of the guns that thundered there a little time ago, the altar-lamp swinging to and fro above the desolation.

There is no room in this or any other paper to list all the runners who distinguished themselves in the Second Battle of the Marne, but one name shall be set down because the name is Irish Stock, and he is—

How perplexing, sometimes, is the runner's task in the war of movement you can guess from the fact that one regimental P.C. just south of the Ourcq moved three times in one day—three moves within the area of a single, heavily shell village. They were wise moves, for each of the abandoned headquarters was destroyed by gunfire—one two hours, one half an hour, one 15 minutes after the colonel had moved on.

One regiment, in the first swift advance of General Mangin's Army, got part of a night's rest in a forest. Their own general, speeding past them at daybreak, noticed that every man had seized the breathing spell not only to sleep but to wash, brush up and shave.

They looked snappy in the morning sunlight. The general said nothing, but his eyes gleamed his appreciation. He is tremendously proud of them. He ought to be.

He was a battling boxer from South Boston before the war and somewhere between Soissons and Rheims, the Germans shot him through the chest. He was being carried from the regimental aid station in a litter when he spied another wounded man from his company lying to one side waiting his turn. The boxer raised such an uproar that they had to let him get off and try to walk while his pal was carried back. The doctors said it would be impossible for him to walk. He walked.

At a battered street corner of a badly demolished French town an American captain stood watching three American doughboys swinging up the road.

"Here comes the greatest men in the world," he said, "just the plain, everyday privates. They are the gamest lot I ever saw. Why, I almost cry every time I think of these kids."

"See those three coming up? Well, if a German regiment should turn the corner and start their way, do you suppose they would break and run? Not an inch. They'd stand right where they are, unsling their rifles and begin firing, killing all they could until the last one of them was shot down."

"I know, for I've seen them do things that took just as much nerve. You can't beat 'em anywhere."

During the German retreat the enemy's last rearward action was made by hostile planes that flew back over the American lines.

One of these planes was flying over a big field in the direction of a French town where American troops were stationed. At the edge of this town an American machine gunner had his machine well camouflaged, waiting for just such a target. Just as the German flyer got half-way across the field, the American opened fire from his hidden position. "Did you get him?" his captain asked a trifle later.

"No, sir," answered the gunner, "but I must have saved him a bit, because he dropped all three of his bombs together out in this vacant field and beat at back about as fast as a bullet could travel."

Another German plane, swooping around a farmhouse, was startled and soon driven away by very accurate rifle fire. At least the firing was accurate enough to convince Fritz that he was in no safe neighborhood.

But he didn't know that the rifle was being handled by a lieutenant colonel in the American Army, who, enraged at the audacity of the hostile birdman, grabbed the weapon and soon had the "supremacy of the air" in that particular locality well under control.

One lieutenant found the full meaning of the famous phrase, "The command is 'Forward!'"

While serving in the advance, he received official notification that he was to report for a certain duty back in the S.O.S. He had found no great trouble in moving forward for over a week. But in starting back he was forced to wait around in the rain with his bedding roll all ready for nearly three days before he could locate any sign of a conveyance leading to the rear.

An Artillery officer, who had been a fairly well-known golfer and a keen enthusiast back home, was looking out across a rolling plain that only recently had been heavily pounded by heavy shell fire.

"I've seen some well-trapped courses," he said, "but I must say this is the best bunker course I've ever run across. There's a pit every 20 feet. Par here must be about 200."

A heavy rain was beating down upon a woods where an American company was resting. It was just after daybreak when an observer, walking by, looked in. The rain was pouring and the trees were dripping a young flood, but every member of the company was still sleeping, dry as dust, for each squad had built itself a canopy from innumerable square boxes that had been discovered in this section.

"Where did they happen to find these boxes?" some one asked.

"German ammunition left behind," was the reply. "Every box you see is full of German rifle bullets. They make the greatest little rain sheds in the world."

body pays a great deal of attention to them. But Friday got his chance, and made the best of it.

His company was held up by a German machine gun, mounted in a tree. The company had halted and was beginning to maneuver to flank the Boche. The method apparently seemed too slow for Friday. Or his brain may have been a bit feverish and sized up the situation from a warped viewpoint, for he already had two bullets in his left shoulder. He had been told to go to the rear, but he held doggedly on. He hadn't got his Boche yet.

Before anyone realized what was happening Friday was up and moving at a rapid gait straight at the tree supporting the Germans, while the gun barked at him. He never faltered, and he reached the tree without further hurt. Under it he fired his pistol twice.

(He had left his automatic rifle behind when he made the dash, for the 15 pounds of it do not facilitate speed.) One German reeled over, and the other was only too willing to yell "Kamerad."

Down he came, juggling the Maxim, and was marched back to the company by Friday. Company B resumed its advance, and Private Frine was now willing to go to the rear.

He had got his Boche.

Three Yanks found themselves in a shell-hole 50 yards from a German machine gun. Two of them had painful head wounds. They were so thirsty they were choking.

It was up to someone to get out and cut the canteens from two good Germans who lay between the shell-hole and the machine gun.

"You stay here," said the old regular to his bunkie, "because you've got a wife. I'm going to pray and go out and get that water."

The fire flew from the clump of bush as he drew near the coveted canteen, but it flew high. He got back safe with the water.

FUSE TO BEAT SOCIALISTS

(BY CABLE TO THE STARS AND STRIPES.)

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